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LETTER DATED 12 DECEMBER 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF UGANDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith, for the information of the members of the Security Council, a communiqué dated 9 December 1996 from the Government of the Republic of Uganda concerning allegations by Zaire against Uganda. I would be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Matia M. SEMAKULA KIWANUKA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Communiqué

The Government of the Republic of Uganda wishes to refer to document S/1996/994 dated 2 December 1996, which was forwarded to the Security Council by the Permanent Mission of Zaire to the United Nations on 2 December 1996.

The Government of the Republic of Uganda categorically refutes the baseless allegations by Zaire and wishes to bring to the attention of the Security Council the following.

Contrary to Zaire's allegations that the Government of Uganda had affirmed that Ugandan troops would remain in Zaire territory, the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) at no time crossed the border and entered into Zairian territory. Instead, on 13 November 1996, Uganda was invaded by forces originating from inside Zaire territory. Those forces occupied Ugandan towns of Bwera, Karambi and Mpondwe for four days. During their occupation, they looted property and killed many innocent Ugandans. UPDF responded and repulsed the invading forces which were given hot pursuit forcing them to retreat into Zaire territory.

On 19 November 1996, the Ugandan border town of Mpondwe was shelled by forces from the Zairian border town of Kasindi. During the shelling some armed groups from inside Zaire attempted to re-enter Uganda's territory. UPDF again responded by destroying positions that the invading forces were using for launching their attacks against Uganda territory. Furthermore, Uganda categorically rejects Zaire's claims that UPDF participated in the fighting in the Zaire town of Beni and other towns inside eastern Zaire.

It is important to note in this regard that the conflict in eastern Zaire is a result of a number of events.

After the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the defeated Rwandan soldiers and the Interahamwe camped along the Zaire-Rwanda border (two miles inside Zairian territory) with all the military hardware they carried from Rwanda.

Pursuant to the resolutions passed by the summit meetings at Cairo and Tunis on the Great Lakes region on 28 and 29 November 1996 and 16 to 18 March 1996, respectively, attended by the following countries: Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zaire and Uganda, President Mobutu undertook to disarm these groups and to move them away from the common border to places acceptable under international law and United Nations conventions. For two years, Zaire continued harbouring armed elements who regularly made cross-border attacks against Rwanda, causing perpetual threat to international peace and security in the region.

In 1981, the Zairian Parliament enacted a law that disenfranchised part of its citizens (Banyamulenge), who have been living in Zaire for over 200 years. This law resulted in discord among the Banyamulenge. The situation was aggravated by the decision taken by the Governor of Kivu Province to expel the Banyamulenge from Zaire.

The internal Zairian dissident groups took advantage of the fluid situation in eastern Zaire and took up arms. Another factor arising out of the fluid situation in Zaire is how that country has become a base for dissident groups bent on destabilizing their neighbours.

An example of that is the time Ugandan dissidents have been living in Zaire, with the full knowledge of the Zairian authorities. These have taken advantage of the prevailing situation and attacked Uganda from Zairian territory. UPDF assumed its constitutional responsibility of defending Uganda and flushed the enemy out of Ugandan territory. Zaire should muster the courage and acknowledge the fact that the problem within eastern Zaire is a result of its own oppressive policies against a section of its citizenry.

Uganda remains committed to working closely with other countries in the region and the rest of the international community to seek peaceful solution to the problems in the region. It is in that regard that Uganda offered to headquarter the multinational force established by the Security Council in its resolution 1080 (1996) of 15 November 1996 to create favourable and safe conditions to facilitate the delivery of international humanitarian assistance to those in need in eastern Zaire.

Let it be understood, however, that Uganda reserves the right to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the event of any form of external aggression, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations.